

News

Employers may seek maids from elsewhere

Maid agencies worried that Manila's regulations on maids' salaries may affect business

REPORTS AND PICTURES: **BENSON ANG**
bang@sph.com.sg

IF EMPLOYERS have to pay more for Filipino maids, they may turn to maids of other nationalities. And this would mean a loss of business for agencies that bring in maids only from the Philippines.

This issue of pay surfaced after the Philippine Embassy asked employment agencies last month to stick to regulations by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA).

These regulations state that a maid's monthly salary must be at least US\$400 (S\$490). She should also get one rest day a week and not be charged placement fees.

Representatives from what appeared to be about 50 employment agencies attended a meeting of the Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore) (AEAS) at the Civil Service Club on Tessensohn Road yesterday to discuss the matter.

They told The New Paper that during the meeting, they were told by the association's president, Ms K. Jayaprema, that she had written to the Philippines Embassy asking for requirements imposed by Manila to be relooked.



MEETING: Representatives from employment agencies registering before the meeting organised by the Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore) yesterday.

On Wednesday, TNP reported that employers might have to pay more for Filipino maids soon.

And it's not just the salaries, they may also have to pay the placement fees – typically costing between \$1,800 and \$2,200 – which have usually been paid by the maid.

Our queries to the embassy, sent on Sept 7, went unanswered as of press time.

The owner of Vine Employment Agency, Mr Yong W. P. said many agencies were worried that it would be hard to “market” maids from the Philippines if the burden of the placement fee is shifted to the employers.

He said: “It might affect business for some agencies. If employers have to pay more, they may look for maids from other nationalities to reduce their financial burden.”

'Not fair'

Mr Francis Yeo, owner of Target Employment Service Centre, said: “Many of us feel it is not fair for employers to fully bear the cost of the maid's placement fee.

“Both parties have to bear some responsibility. Maids should have to bear some form of the cost, at least two months of her salary.”

For now, the agencies still hope a compromise can be reached with the embassy.

A spokesman from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) told TNP in an e-mail that the Philippine Embassy in Singapore has not informed the ministry of any additional requirements to those that are already in existence.

But MOM is aware of the POEA requirements, effected through their standard employment contracts, the spokesman said.

“Employers and employment agencies should assess whether they can meet requirements imposed by source country governments when deciding to hire or bring in foreign domestic workers of a particular nationality,” she said.

The ministry respects the right of of all parties to contract, re-contract and make variations to contracts.

“Parties to a contract should also honour the terms of contracts they have agreed to and signed,” she added.

The spokesman also said that Singapore remains committed to protecting the rights and well-being of foreign domestic workers and supports the principles behind the International Labour Organisation Convention, as well as the accompanying recommendation.

She's abiding by the regulations

SHE is among the first maid agencies to adhere closely to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) regulations.

Filipino maids under Ms Shirley Ng, the owner of Orange Employment Agency, used to be paid S\$480 a month. But since last month, they have to be paid at least US\$400 (\$490) a month.

Ms Ng, who was the past president of Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore), felt that she should adhere to the regulations because the Philippines Embassy explicitly reminded maid agencies here to do so last month.

Her Filipino maids are not charged placement fees and can negotiate rest days with their employers.

As a result of the changes, employers who bring in Filipino maids under her agency have to pay an additional \$1,500 for the recruitment and documentation of the maids, as well as the commission of their suppliers.

Said Ms Ng: “Many employers feel that this sudden switching of the financial burden is harsh.

“This is because – rightly or wrongly – the heavier burden has traditionally been placed on the maids.

“However, I am trying to convince my clients that if they wish to engage Filipino maids, it is only proper

to respect and abide by the country's terms.”

Since the regulations were enforced more strongly, six employers have engaged her to bring in Filipino maids.

One of them, marketing director Audrey Tan, told The New Paper: “I'm not happy with the change, but I don't have a choice.”

The 41-year-old, who applied for a second maid, said she had to pay about \$2,500 to bring in the maid, who is still in the Philippines.

Paid \$700 for first maid

Ms Tan had to pay only about \$700 for her first maid who came to Singapore seven years ago.

She added: “Previously, I don't think things were exploitative because we gave our maid special perks like emotional support and financial help when she needed it.

“Every Chinese New Year, she received hongbao worth over \$800 from us and our relatives.

“I don't mind the regulations, but they're not very family-friendly.

“It will put even more financial pressure on young couples and how will we raise the birth rate like this?”



CHEERY: Ms Shirley Ng (in red), the owner of Orange Employment Agency, with three of her Filipino maids.